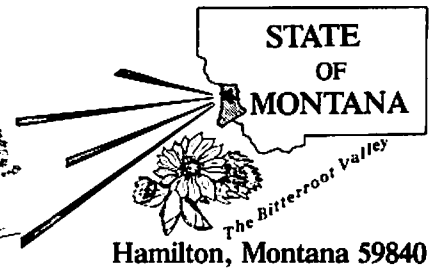
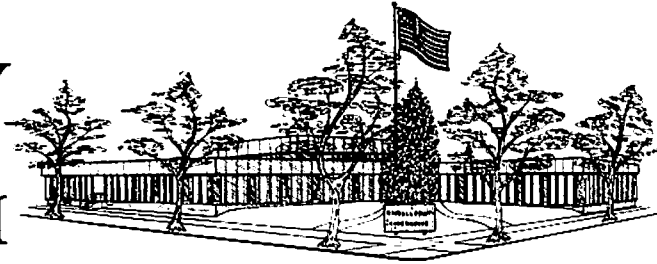


# COUNTY OF RAVALLI



Ravalli County Commissioners  
215 S. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite A  
Hamilton, MT. 59840  
406-375-6500

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February 10, 2009

To: Chairman Rick Laible and Committee Membership  
Education and Cultural Resources Committee  
Montana Senate  
Re: SJ12 Bitterroot Valley Community College Resolution

Chairman Laible and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of the resolution to create the Bitterroot Valley Community College. A community college in the Bitterroot Valley is long overdue. More than 20 years ago, a community effort was launched by the Hamilton school district and the Bitterroot Public Library to establish a community college in Ravalli County. Though the effort was unsuccessful, the need has not disappeared. In fact, the need has only increased, especially in light of two local economic downturns. The first occurred more than a decade ago when the community of Darby lost the timber industry and the jobs that went with it. The current global economic recession has devastated our local building industry.

The best and the most lasting solution to Ravalli County's economic problems is affordable and accessible post-secondary education for our citizens. The argument that the University of Montana and the College of Technology in Missoula meet the educational needs of Bitterroot Valley residents falls short. If that were true, we believe many more Bitterroot students would make the daily commute to Missoula. A community college in the Bitterroot Valley will likely result in an increase in the student enrollment at UM as two-year students graduate to a four-year college.

The community college model is the best model to address the diverse educational needs of our county, particularly with the present economic downturn and the loss of jobs. We need the ability to address workforce training and retraining. A community college would give us the ability to address long term and short term economic development.

We recognize the budgetary constraints the state is under, which is why we believe this resolution is the perfect compromise. Deferring funding for the credit programs that the community college would offer through the state seems appropriate at this time, but we

are here to ask you today to empower our community with the ability to focus on returning people to work now.

A community college curriculum can and should be developed according to local needs – needs that are best defined by the very people who will most benefit from a local college.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
BOARD OF RAVALLI COUNTY COMMISSIONERS